

Love Defined – The Little Black Book Series (Week 1)

INTRO

Q: Are you willing to do whatever it takes to have the marriage you've always hoped for? (It's a strange question to ask teens because many of you haven't put much thought into what you hope for your marriage or how you could begin working towards making it healthy. BUT nonetheless, many of you and your friends are beginning to date anyway. Perhaps that's one reason so many romantic relationships, not only fail, but are destructive. Wouldn't it be foolish to begin a journey without a clear destination in mind?)

Are you willing to be challenged in what you think about love, dating, and marriage? You may be asked to sacrifice your world view. But with courage from the Holy Spirit, you may end up with far more than what you've always hoped for.

Tonight: May you never think of love the same way again.

Get off pedestal: This series will pull from wiser, more experienced people. Introduce the coming Q/A panels and six books.

HOOK

Chick-flick series of events:

- Boy meets girl (usually meeting under less than ideal circumstances)
- Things seem to be developing
- Something goes wrong; everything falls apart – There's no way it'll work out
- One or both of them does something extreme to show their “love”
- They end up together happily ever after

Cultural definition of love: Having powerful and happy feelings toward someone.

Culture has fed us its idea of love since we were children through movies, love songs, shows, etc. I would like to hold this definition up to the light and test it. Let's put it on trial.

Is it working? How can we test it?

The greatest commitment a man and woman can make out of “love” is marriage, a lifelong vow to one another. But divorce peaked at 53% in the 20th century. Take a look at the stats now. See TIME article “The Divorce Rate is Dropping. That May Not Actually Be Good News.” ~See notes~

- Not only are marriages failing everywhere, but the very idea of marriage as being valuable is eroding. Of those which are lasting, one recent study suggests that only 3/10 marriages are fulfilling to the people in them.

Society's form of love and commitment is failing. The principals of love, dating, and marriage it offers us are proving to be wildly incorrect and even unhealthy. But, because it serves the appetites of human emotion and selfishness, few are willing to abort those principals and do something different. It's far easier to blame these failings on the institution of marriage than take personal responsibility for its failure.

- It's like giving away your nice car because it ran out of gas.
- If you have a problem with your marriage... if the grass is greener on the other side of the fence, you haven't been watering your lawn.

We'll need to relearn what we "know". What better source to learn about love than from Love Himself?

BOOK

1 Corinthians 13:1,4-8a - *If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails...*

LOOK

Everywhere we look it seems love is failing. Divorces, breakups, crushed hearts, depression. We hold up the test of society's version of "real" love and it is found to be broken, shallow, and unsustainable.

Tough Questions:

- Why does love seem to fail?
- Why does God's love for us seem distant?

First: In our culture, love has been 1. romanticized (defined by a rush of powerful feelings), 2. sexualized (defined by physical pleasure), and ultimately 3. lobotomized (made empty and ineffective). Explain.

1. Love = romance, overwhelming feelings, shooting stars, the perfect glance.
2. Love is expressed in sex, regarded as a benchmark in connection/commitment.
3. At the end of the day, these ideas have made love shallow, fragile, and fickle.

The (cultural) Love Cycle

1. Fall in love!
2. Season of “Everything is great!”
3. Love fades.
4. One or both partners become frustrated, unhappy
5. Break up
6. Pain/depression
7. Realization of personal needs in the next partner
8. Try again (back to #1)

The Reality of What's Happening

1. Strong feelings/physicality = Infatuation
2. Season of “Everything is great!” = Round table missing two legs.
3. This level of feelings isn’t sustainable (unspoken: “your job = make me happy”)
4. Each partner begins to look to/pull from the other to keep those strong (romantic) feelings alive
5. “My needs aren’t being met.” = Selfishness
6. One or both become frustrated
7. Break up causes pain/depression and rationalize it was the other person’s fault
8. Rebound (back to #1)

Where in this pattern is there patience, kindness, humility, selflessness, support, trust, endurance? Where is there **love**?

The world's test for love: “Do they make you happy?”

- Do you hear the root of that? **Selfishness**.

Important Note: Love and Infatuation fire off the same chemicals and hormones in the brain = they “feel” the same which convinces us it’s love. Why we can’t depend on our hearts.

- **Jeremiah 17:9-10 - The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? “I the Lord search the heart and test the mind...**
 - Feelings can be very real, but very wrong.

Society's Model: The commitment in the relationship stands on feelings holding it up. "I am committed as long as they give me those feelings."

- (Don't we treat our relationship with God like this sometimes?)

Look at our terminology. It reveals what we believe.

- "We *fell* in love." "I was *swept* off my feet." =
 - "I didn't have a choice." "I was a passive victim." "It happened to me." =
 - "I am simply with someone I feel emotional about." Fickle/Frail.

Hitch Video – people have no idea what love actually is.

Emotions aren't meant to be the test of love OR tell you who to love. The commitment of a relationship must stand on something other than feelings.

- Ex: Some girls will try to elicit commitment by working on a guy's feelings.
 - She'll act as if she's in a constant state emergency needing to be comforted/saved.
 - She'll even give herself to him sexually hoping it will tie him to her.

But, she's chasing and sacrificing for the very thing which doesn't last – **emotions**.

We can end up worshiping emotions, worshiping infatuation and calling it love and leaving behind WISDOM and the HOLY SPIRIT.

- **Q: What is love if not a feeling?**

Genesis 1:28 - *And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."*

- God gifted us with free will and strength with the command to go and dominate life – grab it by the horns, thrive in it.
 - C.S. Lewis: Those strong feelings are "something that happens to us. Staying in love is something we DO."
 - God gave us the power, the power to choose.

DEFINE LOVE: A commitment to choose someone.

It's not something which happens to us or something we feel. It's something we choose. (ie. Romantic partner, friend, family, stranger, enemy)

- It's saying, "I choose you despite circumstances, feelings, personal sacrifices."
 - Hear the stability? Do you hear something in that which is weighty, meaningful, selfless, and attractive?

GOOD NEWS: IF LOVE IS A CHOICE, then it empowers you to CHOOSE WISELY.

- Why do smart people get involved with partners who are abusive, manipulative, or who cheat on them?
 - These smart people saw the anger outbursts, recognized the red flags, knew about the porn addiction, but they bought the lie that their strong feelings were a "love" they must commit to.

If love is a choice, then it empowers you to choose wisely. You get to lead with wisdom and the Holy Spirit instead of blind, untrustworthy, temporary feelings.

BUT, if love is a commitment to choose someone, saying "I love you" includes a second implied commitment.

- What we say about someone reflects something about us.
 - If I call you student, I have defined myself as a _____.
 - If I call you friend, I have defined myself as your _____.

If I say, "I commit to choose you only," then I am also saying, "**I commit to be only yours**, to set myself apart for you."

- **Song of Solomon 6:3 – I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine.**
- This is why you shouldn't say, "I love you" too quickly. It's a verbal promise, a statement of commitment. It should never be taken or spoken lightly.
 - Jacqui and I waited until we both knew we wanted to marry each other.

Ex: A teen chooses to only have sex with their future spouse. Consider how this commitment reflects the definition of real love.

- They are choosing **ONLY** their future spouse, **AND** out of that commitment, they are setting themselves apart from everyone else **FOR** only their spouse.

Love Has THREE Indisputable Traits ("I'll defend these later.")

1. **Love is sacrifice, nothing less.**
 - a. Love is a position reversal. You are choosing someone else over yourself.
2. **Love decreases distance.**

- a. Good Samaritan story – Two men increased their distance. One crossed the road to be with him.
- 3. **Love is unconditional.**
 - a. “From this day forward for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part.”

These are your new tests for what love is.

WHAT CAN LOVE STAND ON? If an emotional commitment won't last, **what can a choice commitment stand on?** What can there be between two people that is unchanging and can sustain commitment for a lifetime? Hold that question.

God's Character: Two predominate traits

1. **Love** (commitment to choose) – **1 John 4:8-9** - *But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love. God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him.*
 - a. God defines love using Himself because He is the Originator.
2. **Holiness** (means set apart for a purpose) – **Isaiah 6:3** (Song of the angels) - *“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!”*
 - a. Out of His love spring mercy, grace, forgiveness, and kindness. From His holiness comes His justice, wrath, protection.
 - b. God is entirely other, set apart from creation, from humanity. “Of all the things you worship which are not god, I AM.” - YHWH

Watch this!

John 15:12-14,16a – *“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends... You did not choose me, but I chose you...”*

Romans 5:7-8 – *For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

God, chose US (love), and set HIMSELF apart for us! (holiness)

Real love is the very nature of God and it expresses His relationship with us.

Hebrews 8:10 (dozens of times in the bible) - *For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.* = “I am theirs, and they are mine.”

Not only is He the Originator but gives the ultimate example of love’s 3 traits.

- **Love is sacrifice, nothing less** = Position reversal.
 - **1 John 4:10** – *This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins....*
- **Love decreases distance.**
 - **John 1:14** - *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...*
- **Love is unconditional** = = unconditional forgiveness
 - **Luke 23:34** - *Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.”*

We know He **CHOSE** us because He sacrificed, closed the distance, and gave Himself unconditionally.

Back to the question: If not feelings, what can we anchor the commitment of love in? What can it stand on that is lasting?

Answer: We choose to base our relationships on who God is = everlasting love.

- This is still very abstract. How do we do that? How do we make Him the foundation of any relationship?

Matthew 22:35-39 - *And one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question to test Him. “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” And He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*

- **Notice!** “the second is like” the first!
- Our relationship with our neighbors will be “like” our relationship with God. The depth and strength and lasting power in our other relationships will reflect the one we build with Jesus.

We love (choose) Jesus and set ourselves/our lives apart for Him, and our love for others will reflect THAT commitment.

- God doesn't give us an abstract idea of love. He gives us Himself!
- We give our frail, fickle human love to Him first (**Romans 12:1** - ...present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable **to** God, which is your spiritual worship.) and He gives Himself back to us - through us - to others.
 - How can you someday base your romantic relationship on Jesus? **You put Jesus first.** We make our relationship with Him more important than the relationship with that person.
 - Ex: Triangle – “If we’re both pursuing Jesus, we’ll eventually cross and either walk together or pass by each other.” - Jacqui
 - I want to give Jacqui THAT kind of love. Your friends, family, future spouse, and enemies are worth THAT kind of Love.

RECAP

- Love is not an emotion. Feelings can't be used identify it.
- What is real love? = “I choose you, and I set myself apart for you.”
- Love’s 3 traits: Love sacrifices, decreases distance, and is unconditional.
- God expressed His perfect love through Jesus.
- When we pursue Him first, then all the relationships in our lives will be enriched with His love.

TOOK

Tough Questions:

- Why does love seem to fail? We confuse feelings which are fickle with love.
- Why does God’s love for us seem distant?
 - 1) God can't be in a relationship with you as long as you are choosing another. He is love and holiness, but until you choose Him and set yourself apart for Him, there can be no relationship between you.
 - 2) We are often relying on feelings to indicate His love for us.

Challenge 1: Download the notes and relisten to it on podcast.

Challenge 2: Spot false loves this week in media & in friend’s conversation.

Challenge 3: Pick someone you are going to express love to this week.